

## The University of Southern Mississippi The Aquila Digital Community

---

Publications, Presentations and Other Resources

The Roots of Community

---


3-2017

# Capturing Their Stories: Collecting Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South (Presentation for the Southern History of Education Society Annual Meeting, March 2017)

Matthew R. Griffis

University of Southern Mississippi, [matthew.griffis@usm.edu](mailto:matthew.griffis@usm.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/rocinformationandresources>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Griffis, Matthew R., "Capturing Their Stories: Collecting Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South (Presentation for the Southern History of Education Society Annual Meeting, March 2017)" (2017). *Publications, Presentations and Other Resources*. 4.

<https://aquila.usm.edu/rocinformationandresources/4>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the The Roots of Community at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications, Presentations and Other Resources by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact [Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu](mailto:Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu).

SHOES 2017

## **CAPTURING THEIR STORIES:** Collecting Oral Histories from Users of Segregated Libraries in the South



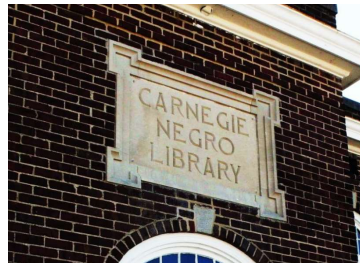
**Matthew Griffis**, Assistant Professor  
School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi  
March, 2017

1

SHOES 2017

## **“Colored” Carnegie Libraries**

- Atlanta, GA
- Evansville, IA
- Greensboro, NC
- Houston, TX
- Knoxville, TN
- Louisville, KY (x 2)
- Meridian, MS
- Mound Bayou, MS
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- Savannah, GA



2

## “Colored” Carnegie Libraries



3

## Research Objectives

- to document the history of all 12 segregated Carnegie libraries
- to investigate the role they played as places of learning and community-making
- to complete oral history interviews with former users and make these interviews publicly available

## Theoretical Framework

- the development of public libraries in the United States (Lee, 1965; Harris, 1973; Garrison, 1979)
- “sense of community” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)
- “sense of place” (Lefebvre, 1974, 1991; Oldenburg, 1989)

4

## SHOES 2017

### Archival Methods

- Meridian, MS (Sep 2016)
- Mound Bayou, MS (Nov 2016)
- Louisville, KY (Western Branch) (Feb 2017)
- Louisville, KY (Eastern Branch) (Feb 2017)



### Oral Histories

- with former users (30-40 mins.)
- recorded and transcribed
- focus on recollections of library, of community
- 3 interviews completed (2 more pending)



5

## SHOES 2017

### Recruitment

- leads/referrals from librarians and archivists
- past news articles about libraries or Civil-Rights-related events
- community organizations
- project website (submission form)
- posters and fliers
- publicity: *Southern Miss Now*, *Meridian Star*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*



6

## Online Archive





**THE ROOTS OF COMMUNITY PROJECT**  
Carnegie Libraries for African Americans 1908-1924

**Oral History with Jerome Wilson**  
November 18, 2016

This oral history is the property of the Roots of Community Project of the University of Southern Mississippi's School of Library and Information Science. Except for the quotation of short excerpts, it may not be reproduced or published in any form without written permission from the Project Director. Please call (601) 266-4228 for more information.

---

**Biography**

Dr. Jerome Wilson was born in Meridian, Mississippi in 1942. He attended St. Joseph's Catholic School in Meridian from kindergarten to secondary school, whereupon he attended Olin College in New Orleans to earn a BA in Chemistry and Mathematics. Wilson later earned an MA in Immunology and Biochemistry from Cornell and, in 1963, earned his PhD in Epidemiology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He spent much of his career as a researcher and a research administrator in the pharmaceutical industry, later transitioning to academia where he helped set up the department of epidemiology at Howard University. Over the course of his career Wilson held appointments at the National Cancer Institute's Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, the Howard University Cancer Center and the Georgetown University School of Medicine, among others.

In later years Wilson took up historical research. In 2010 he and his co-author, Dr. Ethel Young (also a Meridian native) of Kean University, published *African American Children and Missionary Nurses and Parents in Mississippi: Achievement Against Jim Crow Odds*, a book about their educational experiences at Meridian's St. Joseph's Catholic School.

In his youth, Wilson lived within walking distance of Meridian's "colored library" on 13<sup>th</sup> Street. This oral history interview, conducted on 18 November 2016, focuses on Wilson's recollections of that library and his memories of Meridian in the 1950s and early 1960s.

---

**Transcript**

**Griffis:** This is Dr. Matthew Griffis of the University of Southern Mississippi interviewing Jerome Wilson on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I'm in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in my office at the University. Dr. Wilson is Rockville, Maryland. We are, of course, conducting this interview over the phone. And this is an oral history interview for the Roots of Community Project.

1

7

## Contact

Feel free to contact me at [matthew.griffis@usm.edu](mailto:matthew.griffis@usm.edu).

## Acknowledgement

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, grant #RE-31-16-0044-16.

The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



8

## Photo Credits

***Slides 1 and 3:***

Jackson Davis Collection of African American Photographs, University of Virginia Special Collections Library.

***Slides 2 and 6:***

Photos by author.